

## Prayer

Wonderful and glorious Lord, You have made a beautiful and amazing world for us, and You have supplied everything necessary for us to enjoy life within it. You have also provided us with all we need to overcome evil with good, through the life, death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ. May we not be so foolish as to ignore the consequences of our selfish actions, and may we always remember that our life, our work, our faith, and our eternal destiny are in Your hands. Therefore, let us not be backward in coming forward to praise You! AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Christian hope

Pray today about the great and certain hope of the Lord's coming again in glory. Some Christians have difficulty with this, but we cannot escape the fact that it is an essential part of Biblical teaching. When Christ comes in glory He will complete the hope of all God's faithful people throughout history and bring Creation to its completion. Pray that we will be ready.

## Meditation

The life of faith is not always clear, and we may not know what to do;  
We face new challenges each day; and we must decide

when we should speak out the truth, for the sake of the Gospel;  
or be silent and allow the Gospel to speak for itself.

when we should act and do the work of the Kingdom;  
or stand aside and let others take the strain.

when we should think carefully and study the Word of the Lord;  
or act on impulse because the Spirit bids us on.

when we should confer with others so that God's people can agree;  
or act alone for the call is to us, and us alone.

when we should challenge what is happening around us in God's name;  
or encourage others to find God's truth for themselves.

So ask for the gift of discernment, that crucial spiritual gift,  
Too often forgotten, but needed by all for the work of the Kingdom.

## Bible Study - Galatians 5:19-26

<sup>19</sup> Now the works of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, licentiousness, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, revelry, and the like. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

<sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires; <sup>25</sup> so if we live in the Spirit, then let us also walk in the Spirit; <sup>26</sup> let us not become conceited, irritating one another and envying one another.

### Review

It is always a privilege to read one of the truly great passages of Scripture, texts that have inspired millions and have been memorised by countless thousands of people. This passage is well known by all who have sought to serve God and live according to the Spirit, especially, the middle of this passage where we find the famous 'Fruit of the Spirit' (5:22,23), a list of qualities of the spirit-filled life unparalleled in Paul's writings. This is the answer to give when a young Christian says, 'How should I live the Christian life?' or 'What are the marks of true discipleship?'

However, in order to understand the deep spiritual truths that lie behind what Paul says, we have to accept that the 'Fruit of the Spirit' is not an ideology we can pluck out of Scripture as if it could stand alone as worthy advice for the soul. It is part of Paul's advice to his beloved Galatian churches which were founded as a result of his first missionary work in Asia. They had been all but torn apart by dissension and strife due to the heretical teaching of Judaisers;

but Paul was intent on giving them the 'meaty' truths of the Gospel from which they could feed instead of floundering in false teaching.

Many versions of the Bible, conscious of the unparalleled interest in the 'Fruit of the Spirit', begin a paragraph at verse 22 where Paul describes these famous qualities of Christian character. However, this is a quite unreal way of expressing the original Greek of Paul's letter. The 'Fruit of the Spirit' is the second part of a contrast which Paul draws between 'the sinful nature' (5:19) and 'the Spirit' (5:22), and if you have studied this passage carefully, you will know that Paul has already written about the conflict between these two within the human soul (5:16-18). He has taught that although a Christian has been saved by Christ, has received the Spirit, and aspires to the things of God, the sinful human nature is still like a brake upon the enthusiasm and effort of one who is saved. None of us can escape our human nature, not even Paul (as he describes himself in Romans 7:14-25), we can only overcome it by the accepting the presence of the Holy Spirit of God.

When talking about the 'Fruit of the Spirit', the first thing we must remember is that these qualities are not going to suddenly appear in someone who is saved, after baptism, as if by magic. Human nature is far more complex than this. Indeed, the purpose of the two lists, the 'works of the sinful nature' and the 'Fruit of the Spirit', is to give us clear guidance about what is right human behaviour and what is wrong human behaviour. As Paul knew, we are weak as long as we live on earth, but without absolute and clear guidelines about what God expects of us and the difference between earthly things and heavenly things, we are lost. The duty of a Christian, as he makes clear in verses 24 to 26 is to be focussed on the things of the Spirit to the exclusion of all else, so that when we have fallen, we know it, and can turn back to what we know to be right.

Paul identifies nine characteristics of the one 'fruit' of the Holy Spirit (5:22,23), and all of them are interdependent. We cannot speak about having some but not others, for to say this would show complete ignorance of what Paul is saying here. The work of the Spirit in the life of the believer is shown in 'love, joy, peace ...'; all of these and no less. They are not gifts given by God or natural characteristics that some have but others do not. They are simply the consequence of God working in the Christian soul, and if they are not evident, then it is doubtful that God is at work.

It is unfortunately true that much Christian endeavour fails because people accept human rather than spiritual standards and do not allow the Spirit to do these things within. For example, when sinful things are said or done in church, people say 'oh that's just how I am' or 'it's just how they are', but this is how Satan pulls people back towards the 'works of sinful nature'. However, the 'Fruit of the Spirit' is a crucial guide to what happens in the life of one who has been moved by the Spirit of God. As Paul comments a few verses later; 'Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires; so if we live in the Spirit, then let us also walk in the Spirit.' (5:25,26)

### Going Deeper

In order to study this marvellous passage, we will begin by looking at the 'works of the sinful nature' which are more than just a list of evils. Then, when we examine the 'Fruit of the Spirit', the first thing we must account for is that fact that Paul does not describe these as a collection of different 'virtues'; they are one virtue, the 'Fruit'. Finally, we will take stock of Paul's summary call; 'Crucify the sinful nature!'

#### ***The works of sinful nature***

Paul's initial comment is almost casual; 'the works of the sinful nature are obvious.' They may be obvious to some, but they are not to others! One of the difficult issues faced by the church is how to deal with people who have problems letting go of various forms of personal behaviour when they become Christians. The church is reluctant to sound unloving to people who are making an effort but cannot face all the consequences of change, so the result is that their worldly behaviour becomes tolerated and the clear boundaries drawn by Scripture become blurred. So, for example, I have come across Christians of many years standing who maintain a completely 'loose' attitude towards sexual relationships and see no problem in this, or others who know they have a problem with anger but reckon that this is their personality and have no intention of even attempting to change; indeed to suggest so would be seen as an insult.

Paul would have observed similar but different problems amongst those who came to faith, and in the list of the 'works of the sinful nature', he sought to identify examples of human sin which were contrary to 'the Spirit'. It was clearly impossible for Paul to write a complete list of all sins against people and against God; to do so would be legalistic, and he had spent the whole letter to the Galatians arguing against legalism! However, the list he wrote is intended to be

comprehensively representative of those attitudes and forms of behaviour which demonstrate the presence of sin and are unacceptable to God and the church.

To begin with, Paul identifies three sins of sexual sensuality, starting with 'immorality', which comes from the Greek word 'pornea' from which we get the word 'pornography'. The next two words, 'impurity' and 'licentiousness' have more general meanings, but in this context they refer to the particular sins of moral impurity and loose sexual behaviour which are an affront to God. If we do not know why this is, then other Biblical texts, such as the description of the creation of man and woman (Gen 1:27,28, 2:21-25) and the words of Jesus (Matt 19:5) should help us understand why sex is intended by God to reflect a unique relationship between a man and a woman.

Following this, Paul identified 'idolatry and sorcery' as two practices which are an affront to the very nature of God, each of them being an activity which attempts to replace God with human alternatives; either the worship of other gods or the practice of magic arts. Then, the next eight items all illustrate various forms of contentious human behaviour; 'hatred, rivalry, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy' (5:20,21), and may well have been triggered in Paul's mind by the strife he had heard about in the churches of Galatia. Certainly, most of us know quite well that once relationships break down between people, any or all of these sins will arise, whether inside or outside of the church!

The last two items in Paul's list are 'drunkenness and revelry'. These words conjure up an image of the misuse of alcohol and bouts of drinking. But in Paul's day, they also reflected the use of other drugs and semi-religious 'orgies' in which reckless human behaviour was offered to the gods (even today, there are religions based around the consumption of hallucinogenic drugs, for example), and as far as Paul was concerned, such behaviour was the very antithesis of honourable behaviour before others and before God. The whole list seems to reflect division between people and also between people and God, as Paul says; 'those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.'

### ***The fruit of the Spirit***

If these aspects of human behaviour are unacceptable to God, then by contrast, Paul talks about a list of different human characteristics and experiences which he calls the 'Fruit of the Spirit'. Before we look at this famous list of nine virtues, it is very important to notice that Paul regards them as one thing, for all them are described as one 'fruit'. The word 'fruit' is a powerful word in Scripture, and is often used to describe what God looks for in His people. In the Old Testament, Isaiah talked about how God looked for 'fruit' from the vine He had planted (Isaiah 5:2), and Jesus talked about how a vine had to be pruned so that it could 'bear fruit' (John 15:5, etc). If we put together all that Scripture says about fruit, then it appears to be the visible evidence of God's work in the world. For this reason, when Paul talks about the 'Fruit of the Spirit', what he undoubtedly means is 'the evidence of the work of the Spirit of God in the believer.' Now in this passage, Paul makes it clear that this 'fruit', although it is one thing, it is demonstrated in a number of ways, hence the list.

It would be wrong, however, to say this list is arbitrary; or that it is casually reflective of those things which might reflect the presence of the Spirit in the believer on some occasions but not on others! By writing as he does, Paul seems to suggest that he expects the one who is really following the way of the Spirit to demonstrate most if not all of the qualities. Although it would be possible to go through the list and describe each of them; 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control,' there is little mystery for us about what these things mean; unlike the confusion which may surround what Paul means by 'revelry' in the list of the works of the sinful nature, above. Whatever we think about these qualities, most people know what they mean; the only general misunderstanding about them being that some people think they are 'soft'. In reality, those who think like this are usually those who have never faced the exacting demands of what it means to truly love someone (for example), because of personal lifestyle choices or emotional immaturity.

Each word of this great list reflects some great part of the wondrous relationship of God and humanity which has been made possible by Jesus Christ; love is relationship restored, joy is the emotional response to deliverance, peace with God is Christ's gift to us or righteousness, patience describes God's attitude towards the sinner (along with kindness), for example. Finally, 'self control' is God's gift to those who have complete confidence in their Lord and God for in Him, there is nothing to fear. The whole passage suggests that Paul expects all Christians to demonstrate all these qualities in different measures and in different ways, but as one 'fruit'; because we have all received the same salvation through the same God, the same Saviour and the same Spirit! We should expect to see these things in each other generally;

they are not aspects of personal character which we are entitled to pick off the supermarket shelf of Christian spirituality, and say 'this is me, I am like this!'

### ***Crucifying the sinful nature***

This is what Paul means by saying, 'Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature ... live in the Spirit ... walk in the Spirit' (5:24,25). Once we are released from the terrible spiritual strain of broken human nature, then we become free to live and walk as guided by the Spirit, and not according to our personal feelings. However, it is generally true that it does not seem like this to those who have yet to respond by faith to Jesus Christ and give themselves to God. To 'crucify the sinful nature' is a hard and difficult thing to do because the stigma of crucifixion is harsh and challenging. It signifies 'no going back', and 'putting to death' those things that are wrong in our lives, even if we have become attached to them.

None of this makes sense unless a person has come face to face with their own sin and face to face with the God who can save them if they will respond to Him by faith. It is religious mumbo-jumbo to those who think that Christianity is a religious system which enables people to be fulfilled in themselves, rather than fulfilled in the God who made them. It is also impossible for those who flirt with Christianity and refuse to accept the gift of God's Spirit, given to all those who have confessed faith in Him; for such people, the 'Fruit of the Spirit' is an exercise in comparing and contrasting 'good' qualities of humanity. The 'Fruit of the Spirit' is the evidence of the salvation of the soul in the life of the believer, no less, and whilst there is no doubt that none of us are perfect, this remains our perfect, scriptural example of Christian life and morality.

### **Application**

I find it painful to write about these wonderful spiritual truths because too many Christian people I know find it hard to accept the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and as long as this is so, this incredible Scripture remains something they can only observe from the outside. The glory of this great text, both the awfulness of the 'works of the sinful nature' and the wonders of the 'Fruit', are found when the believer is truly 'crucified with Christ' and has found both new life, and accepted the gift of God's Spirit by which to make these spiritual things a reality in their lives. It has been true throughout the history of the church, and Paul doubtless saw something of this in the conflicts which erupted in the Galatian churches, that the sinful human nature can and will pull the Christian back into all kinds of appalling behaviour, unless people have 'crucified the sinful nature'. This, I believe, is the reason why Paul wrote in this powerful way to describe the works of sinful nature and the 'Fruit of the Spirit'.

On the one hand, I have had to help Christian people deal with some quite brutal and irresponsible behaviour from others in the church who should know better, and it makes you wonder whether such people believe they are supposed to demonstrate 'love, joy, peace, etc.' and not just when they want to! I find it staggering how quickly some will abandon all and every feature of this great teaching, particularly in committee meetings (thus giving this important part of church life a bad name). On the other hand, I have seen people so completely transformed by the power of the Spirit that although their characters are as sharp and undimmed as ever they were, the 'Fruit of the Spirit' all glow within them with a radiancy which positively attracts others and advocates the Gospel. Indeed, I believe that when people in the world see true 'love, joy, peace, patience, etc.' demonstrated by the power of the Spirit within the lives of others, it breaks down barriers and powerfully advocates the Kingdom of God. All that is needed from us is the desire to 'crucify the sinful nature', and receive the Holy Spirit, who makes these things real; not for us to claim, but for others to see in us and give glory to God.

### **Questions** *(for use in groups)*

1. What does the list of the 'works of the sinful nature' teach us today?
2. What does the list of the 'Fruit of the Spirit' teach us today, and how may we demonstrate these qualities without drawing attention to ourselves?
3. What things have happened in your own church life which demonstrate some of the things talked about in this study?

### **Discipleship**

The challenge we all face after reading a passage such as this is whether we are truly responsive to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. On this occasion, I suggest taking time out to pray and ask the Lord to fill us with His Spirit, so that we can naturally demonstrate the Fruit of the Spirit in such a way that gives glory to God and does not draw attention to ourselves. Let us be quite specific about this; our prayer is to glorify God, not ourselves.

### **Final Prayer**

Our life at home and at work is blessed by special days; birthdays, anniversaries, festivities and other events. Lord Jesus, help us make the most of all these occasions, and may we praise You in our joy and celebrations and give honour to the Spirit who gives us life, in all its fullness. AMEN